

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: What is Anthrax?**

**A:** Anthrax is an acute infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bacillus anthracis*, and occurs both in people and animals.

**Q: Does the public health department have Anthrax vaccine?**

**A:** No. The only people receiving the anthrax vaccine are military units and personnel involved in research.

**Q: How is Anthrax Transmitted?**

**A:** Anthrax can be transmitted three ways: by touching the bacteria, inhaling it, or swallowing it. However, it cannot be transmitted from person to person.

**Q: What are the symptoms of Anthrax?**

**A:** Symptoms of disease vary depending on how the disease was contracted, but symptoms usually occur within 7 days.

**Cutaneous (or skin disease):** Most (about 95%) anthrax infections occur when the bacterium enter a cut or abrasion on the skin. Skin infection begins as a raised itchy bump that resembles an insect bite but within 1-2 days develops into a fluid filled blister and then a painless ulcer, usually about the size of a penny, with a characteristic black dying area in the center. Lymph glands in the adjacent area may swell.

**Inhalation:** Initial symptoms may resemble a common cold. After several days, the symptoms may progress to severe breathing problems and shock. Inhalation anthrax is usually fatal.

**Intestinal:** Initial signs of nausea, loss of appetite, vomiting, and fever are followed by abdominal pain, vomiting of blood, and severe diarrhea.

**Q: Can Anthrax be spread from person to person?**

**A:** Direct person-to-person spread of anthrax is extremely unlikely to occur. There are currently no known cases of person-to-person transmission of anthrax.

**Q: How is Anthrax treated?**

**A:** Anthrax exposure is treated with antibiotics. If you already have symptoms of the disease with a documented exposure, you will be placed on antibiotics. Early treatment is essential.

**Q: What is Smallpox?**

**A:** Smallpox is a viral disease that was eliminated in 1977.

**Q: Does the public health department have Smallpox vaccine?**

**A:** No. The Federal government has a supply of Smallpox vaccine, which they are holding for use in a bioterrorist event involving Smallpox. The vaccine is otherwise unavailable.

**Q: How is Smallpox transmitted?**

**A:** Smallpox is spread from one person to another by infected saliva droplets that expose a susceptible person having face-to-face contact with the ill person. Smallpox can also be transmitted via infected laundry, bedding, etc.

Q: What are the symptoms of Smallpox?

A: Initial symptoms include high fever, fatigue, and head and back aches. A characteristic rash, most prominent on the face, arms, and legs, follows in 2-3 days. The rash starts with flat red lesions that evolve at the same rate. Lesions become pus-filled and begin to crust early in the second week. Scabs develop and then separate and fall off after about 3-4 weeks. Smallpox is distinct from Chickenpox in that in Smallpox, the rash will develop over the body and extremities at the same time, while in Chickenpox, the rash develops first on the body, and spreads to the extremities.

Q: Can Smallpox be spread from person to person?

A: Yes. Smallpox is highly contagious.

Q: How is Smallpox treated?

A: Vaccination within 7 days of exposure may lessen disease. Otherwise, the use of antiviral medicine may help persons infected.

Q: What is the incubation period of Smallpox?

A: 7-19 days (1-3 weeks)

Q: What are the characteristics of suspicious letters or packages?

A: Excessive postage; handwritten or poorly typed addresses; incorrect titles; title, but no name; misspellings of common words; oily stains, discolorations, or odor; no return address; excessive weight; lopsided or uneven envelope; protruding wires or aluminum foil; excessive security material (e.g., masking tape, string); Visual distractions; marked with restrictive endorsements (e.g., "Personal" or "Confidential"); postmark with city/state not matching return address.

Q: What should I do with a suspicious letter/package?

A: Take these precautions:

- Do not open.
- Do not shake or empty contents.
- Place the envelope or container in a Ziploc or similar type baggie and then place this inside another bag (double bag).
- If contents have been spilled or leaked, cover the item.
- Leave the room and close the door.
- Before leaving the residence, wash your face and hands with soap and water.
- If between the hours of 8-5, M-F, call Environmental Health at (805) 781-5544, Otherwise, call (805) 781-4550 for further directions.